

“A Mentor for Good Giving”

11 November 2018: 25th Sunday after Pentecost

Salado UMC—Salado, Texas

Preaching Text: Mark 12:38-44

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**“He who gives what he would as readily throw away, gives without generosity;
for the essence of generosity is in self-sacrifice” — (Henry Taylor).**

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Veterans’ Day is a federal holiday (previously Armistice Day) observed annually on 11 November, in the US, but other countries celebrate it as well. In the US, it is a day that honors all soldiers who served as military veterans in the US Armed Forces. Also, Veterans’ Day 2018 is the anniversary of signing the WW I armistice ending hostilities between the Allies and Germany in 1918.

[Silent Prayer]

Hear the day’s lesson:

38 As he taught, he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, 39 and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! 40 They devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”

41 He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. 42 A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. 43 Then he called his disciples and said to them, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. 44 For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on” (Mark 12:38-44).

Something Jesus offers disciples in this text is a warning against faulty faith expressions. Jesus denounces the scribes and cautions against:

- a desire for status rather than service;
- a desire for esteem instead of seeking the good of others;
- and third of all, using one’s position for advancement and self-gain.

Faith lived as devotion means to relate rightly to God and to neighbor—as Jesus praised the scribe for noting this aspect of faith in last week’s lesson. Authentic reverence for God liberates our hearts to give generously to both God and neighbor.

Jesus teaches the 12 a vivid lesson in giving with love. Love does not keep score; love spends plentifully! Jesus drove this point home to his disciples while observing people offering their temple gifts. Jesus praised a poor widow who gave the smallest of coins, contrasting her to the affluent who gave greater sums. How can someone in poverty give more than someone who has ample means? Jesus’ answer is simple: real giving comes from the heart. A grudging gift or a gift given for display loses its

value. Yet a gift given out of generous and sacrificial love is invaluable. The size does not matter (contra Marco Rubio referring to Donald Trump: see CNN website 4 March 2016).

The poor widow could have kept one of her two coins, but instead she rashly gave away all she had! Jesus praised someone who gave barely a penny—how insignificant a sum we think—because it was everything she had, her whole living. What we have to offer may look very small and unworthy, but no matter how insignificant it may seem to us, God can use it far beyond our reckoning. Do you know the joy and freedom of giving substantially to God and to neighbor with loving gratitude?

We might say that this poor widow was something of a mentor for good giving, especially as Jesus reminds his disciples and us that “. . . she out of her poverty has put in everything she had . . .” (Mark 12:44).

Of course, there are skeptics. “You have come a long way baby,” the old cigarette advertisement suggests. These companies want to appeal to a new female generation, luring them into becoming smokers. This example signals but one of thousands of changes in the status and role of women from earlier days. Women not only vote with significance today, but hold substantial political offices. Women have flooded the workplace and are leaders in many Christian communities. They are doctors and lawyers and judges and such. Women’s economy has introduced a seismic shift from the day when Jesus told this parable, “the Widow’s Mite.”

Online (or in any bookstore still functioning), we find a profusion of publications that remind us women in general, and specifically widows, control vast amounts of wealth in the United States. Regularly this wealth originates from inheritance at the time of a spouse’s death. Yet many hard-working women accrue resources by also being shrewd investors. Thus, in some ways the social context upon which Jesus establishes his parable is no longer in force. Yet, even today, women and children bear most of the brunt of poverty—a fact that should never escape people of conscience.

Even so the “Widow’s Mite” is a dearly beloved story. As originally told by Jesus, the parable’s intent addresses the stewardship law that all persons have some gift to give—no matter how large or how small. Thus, the parable is more about the willingness to give, rather than about the ability to give. I remember once reading a story about generosity. The author wrote:

Today, at the local convenience store where I work an elderly man with a guide dog came in, went to the aisle with the greetings cards, picked up a card, held it up extremely close to his face, and struggled to read it. Just as I was about to walk over to help him, a big truck driver asked him if he needed assistance reading, and then proceeded to read him almost every single greeting card out loud until the elderly man smiled and said, “That’s perfect! My wife will love that one!”

Likewise, Fred B. Craddock wrote:

The issues of wealth and poverty are complex Anxiety about money is a disease among both those who have it and those who do not Generous sharing of one’s goods can free one from the danger to the soul which lies coiled in the possession of things The disciples are to handle material things so as to secure heaven and the future. How one handles property has eternal consequences The life of the disciple is one of faithful attention to the frequent and familiar tasks of each day, however small or insignificant they may seem. The one faithful in today’s nickels and dimes is the one to be trusted with the big account [*Luke: Interpretation* (Louisville:

W/JKP, 2009) 189-191. cf. Luke 16:1-13].

Later, Craddock addressed ministers and shared the practical implications of living for Christ: **“We think giving our all to the Lord is like taking a \$1000 bill and laying it on the table—‘Here’s my life, Lord. I’m giving it all.’ But the reality for most of us is that he sends us to the bank and has us cash in the \$1000 for quarters. We go through life putting out 25 cents here and 50 cents there. Listen to the neighbor kid’s troubles instead of saying, ‘Get lost.’ Go to a committee meeting instead of doing what we want to do. Giving a cup of water to a shaky old man in a nursing home instead of hanging out with our friends. Usually giving our life to Christ isn’t glorious. It’s done in all those little acts of love, 25 cents at time. It would be easy to go out in a flash of glory; it’s harder to live the Christian life little by little over the long haul”**

(www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/f/faithfulness.htm).

We live in a world in which people are occasionally inclined to be generous with other people—often anonymously as a newspaper Christmas Fund called “Good-fellows” [*The Fort Worth Star-Telegram*] proves. But we reflect true Christian generosity over time in the nickels and dimes of life—giving consistent, regular, and predictable.

One such example concerns a 64-year-old Englishman who has been donating a pint of blood every three months for 30 years. Over that time, he’s given about 120 pints, according to *The Nottingham Post*. He also donates his platelets regularly. Colin Harrison said he started to give blood because he had just gotten divorced and was feeling emotional. “It’s terrific and there’s nothing to it really, it’s very simple and easy to do and you make such a difference.” He added. “I just think everyone should do it.” Harrison can’t give any more blood now, though. The scar tissue on his arm has become so thick that needles can’t easily penetrate.

Giving to the church in regular and steady increments can go a long way in helping us keep our wealth or possessions in proper perspective. Many in our world today gauge the success of life in the things we own. Yet another way to examine life is to measure it by what we have shared with others.

My late friend, Don Shelby, wrote: “The true reason for a Christian’s giving is gratitude to God. The greatest joy in Christian giving comes when we simply cannot do otherwise.” I find that to be personally and permanently true. I hope you do, too!

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